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## *Touch, Listen, Experience*

Let us begin our considerations circumspectly, with official, verifiable (this will be much harder later on) dictionary definitions: in etymological terms, the word *mousikē* signifies something which ‘belongs to the realm of the Muses’. Originally, it was an adjective describing a certain skill which could be trained. In Hellenic times, it was most commonly used to define the process of educating youngsters in poetry and music. This connotation with education came first – the association with music is of a much later provenance.<sup>1</sup>

It was by means of this *mousikē* that the illiterate society transmitted its values; thus chant and accompaniment had a clear educational, not to say pedagogical, dimension. In this respect, it is worth referring to the song of the Sirens, familiar from the pages of the *Odyssey*, the words of which expressed what for the Ancient Greeks was the sweetest of temptations – the promise of secret knowledge. The myth of Odysseus, who, to avoid temptation, plugged his sailors’ ears with wax and had them tie him to the spar of a mast, provides a good illustration of the ambivalence inherent in *mousikē*, and of the scandal inherent in teaching through music. Moreover, iconologists further relate that the Sirens were sometimes portrayed as monsters from the Underworld, and other times as fabulous creatures inhabiting the heavenly spheres.<sup>2</sup>

Passing over the whole extraordinary sphere of mythopoetics, let us note here the interesting fact that Sirens are familiar to sailors the whole world over. They have been encountered by men from Norway, New Guinea and Mexico, their description was left by the famous navigator Henry Hudson, and their image – drawn on maps, tattooed on arms and

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<sup>1</sup> Etymology given here after Warren D. Anderson, ‘Etyczne i duchowe aspekty muzyki starożytnej Grecji’ [Ethical and Spiritual Aspects of the Music of Ancient Greece], *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty* 54 (2000), 104-107.

<sup>2</sup> Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury* [Dictionary of Cultural Myths and Traditions] (Warsaw, 1991), 1127.

depicted on the prows of ships – has become the personification of treacherous sensuality.<sup>3</sup> Yet the Greek Sirens, serving the divine Aphrodite and leading men to their doom with their song,<sup>4</sup> certainly represent one of the key *topoi* behind the emergence of the myth of fatal attraction. For us, meanwhile, it points up that paradoxical, yet at the same time very close, almost osmotic, relationship between music and passion.

For the scholar of culture, it is intriguing in that with the demise of Antiquity music ceased for a long time to be associated with erotic games. Of course, we know that the strophes of the *Song of Songs* were reserved for the ears of adult men of over thirty;<sup>5</sup> there is also a wealth of literature concerning the erotic aura surrounding the love songs of the mediaeval troubadours;<sup>6</sup> yet examples of this kind relate, not to music itself, but to the semantics of words. For a very long time, music was considered from the perspective of the eccentric output of inspired artists, who were unlikely (or so it was believed) to entertain the idea of composing a musical backdrop to the erotic games played out by lesser mortals.

Let us now take a look at eroticism – at that sphere of existence which we would like to discuss in respect to its relations with music. In this case, even scholarly definitions shed little light on the subject: 'Eroticism is the most mysterious, the most general and the furthest removed of subjects',<sup>7</sup> so Georges Bataille stated with exceeding ambiguity in 1957. A quarter of a century later, the French scholar was echoed by Kazimierz Imieliński: 'It is difficult to speak and to write about subjects related to eroticism. They are controversial and raise many doubts, reservations and objections, as ensue from the very essence of the phenomenon'.<sup>8</sup> Whilst we learn nothing more precise from Imieliński about this essence, we do gain the impression that it is extremely vague and belongs to that group of social discourses which live rather more intuitively than overtly, more often dwelling in the cultural suburbs than the common agora.

<sup>3</sup> Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of Love* (New York, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> 'They are wonderful singers both in the tales of the Argonauts and in the *Odyssey*, yet constantly dangerous. It is frightening to see how many skeletons lie around them, some already utterly white, others slowly emerging from decaying bodies. They are the skeletons of sailors who heard the captivatingly beautiful song, and arriving at the island listened to it exclusively and endlessly, and died without knowing they were dying'; Zygmunt Kubiak, *Mitologia Greków i Rzymian* [The Mythology of the Greeks and Romans] (Warsaw, 1998), 494.

<sup>5</sup> Othmar Keel, *Das Hohelied* (Zurich, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York, 1956).

<sup>7</sup> Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme* (Paris, 1957).

<sup>8</sup> Kazimierz Imieliński, *Erotyzm* (Warsaw, 1973), 7.

The current edition of the *Encyklopedia Popularna PWN* lends credence to the opinions cited above. One seeks in vain the headword 'eroticism'; this entire sphere of human life exists among the many thousands of entries merely as 'the morbid heightening of sexual excitability', in other words, 'erotic madness'.<sup>9</sup> So should it come as any surprise, in light of this, that the erotic asemanticity of music appears to be an incontrovertible fact? The aforementioned Imieliński, in hierarchising erotically arousing stimuli, places visual stimuli to the fore, explaining that 'most people, particularly men, manifest a sort of visual fetishism'.<sup>10</sup> Second place is allotted to tactile stimuli, and to that which the well-known Polish scholar refers to as the 'sensual mood'. Only then does he move on to audio stimuli (distinguished together with stimuli of smell and taste), although that which Imieliński attributes to this aspect of eroticism is highly distinctive and characteristic: 'the rustle of stockings removed, of buttons undone, the sound of the voice of the woman one loves [...] musical compositions – melodies most often associated with one's beloved or with raptures experienced together'.<sup>11</sup>

The matter seems clear, then: the Western version of eroticism is founded on the position of the looker and the toucher. And female scholars doubtless justifiably speak of the male eye's tyranny and of the woman as an object 'to be looked at'.<sup>12</sup> This is a view shared by Octavio Paz, who writes in his wonderful 'feature-length' essay that 'Erotic contact begins with the sight of the desired body'.<sup>13</sup> 'And where lies the ear in all of this?' one may pertinently enquire... a long way behind. The acoustic domain of contemporary eroticism is delimited above all by the gamut of sighs and shrieks (the caricatural excess of which is offered by pornographic films), by the sounds of clothing discarded or furniture creaking. And even when music is treated in terms of a true value in the erotic economy, it is not in respect to the music itself, but rather by dint of the fact that it signifies the memory of something which was previously seen or touched.

So, as we see, eroticism remains a marginalized, highly unclear, not to say – for the serious scholar – inconvenient (that encyclopaedic 'madness') subject. If, in addition, we associate this nebulous notion of eroticism with the equally volatile and incoherent notion of music, we find that a sphere of interest construed in such way may turn out to be *sans*

<sup>9</sup> *Encyklopedia Popularna PWN*, 16<sup>th</sup> edn., rev. and suppl. (Warsaw, 1996), 213.

<sup>10</sup> Imieliński, *Erotyzm*, 145.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Octavio Paz, *La llama doble. Amor y erotismo* (Barcelona, 1993).

*issue*. Happily, no paradigm of thinking about reality once established is entitled to remain current forever. The sociology of music that emerged during the early decades of the twentieth century shifted the petrified perspective: music ceased to be perceived as the result of an isolated, individual creative process, and came to be seen as a cultural product – changeable over time and space, discharging various functions and used to a variety of ends. Scholars turned their attentions to such areas as the social functions of music – now extended into our enquiries regarding the union between melodic lines and hip curves – and also began to analyse the experiencing of music, ‘the arising, disappearing and differentiation of musical preferences, the social significance of aesthetic experience’.<sup>14</sup> So let us enquire, in a similar vein, whether the experiencing of music can be an erotic experience, whether the experience of one may intensify or trigger the other, and finally whether music and erotica may be to the same degree integral parts of an aesthetic experience.

Were we to remain with the opinions and authors cited earlier, the answers to these questions would be either negative or else controversial and rather unsound. However, since music became a real – and, at times, such a crucial! – part of individual and common human life (at least since the mid 1960s), the anthropologist is able to ponder it like any other cultural phenomenon. One such ponderer is Sasha Weitman, the author of a study meaningfully titled ‘On the Elementary Forms of the Socioerotic Life’.<sup>15</sup> Weitman proffers a systematic description of contemporary erotic behaviours, which he calls ‘socioerotica’. These he sees as forming a separate, distinctive sphere of existence, which not only encompasses much more than the act of copulation, but is, in addition, a complex cultural construct, imposing on lovers a strict regime of roles and behaviours. Socioerotica possesses not a natural or spontaneous character, but resembles rather Edmund Husserl’s ‘life-worlds’, the ‘realnesses’ of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, Ludwig von Wittgenstein’s ‘language games’, Erving Goffman’s ‘frameworks’ or the ‘cultural systems’ of Clifford Geertz.<sup>16</sup>

Erotic reality consists of carefully chosen intervals of time (evening, night, weekend, vacation), judiciously selected locations (home, bedroom, hotel, isolated beach, back seat of a car), relaxing substances (alcohol, certain narcotics, a shared ‘post-climactic’ cigarette) and also appropriate scenery (curtains drawn, lights dimmed, a fire in the hearth, sexy linge-

<sup>14</sup> *Mała encyklopedia muzyki* [Concise Encyclopaedia of Music], ed. Stefan Śledziński (Warsaw, 1968), 955.

<sup>15</sup> Sasha Weitman, ‘On the Elementary Forms of the Socioerotic Life’, *Theory, Culture and Society* 15/3 (1998), 71–110.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

rie), in which music has a particular role to play. Neither Weitman nor anyone else, to our knowledge, has carried out in-depth analysis of preferences in respect to the music that fills this erotic reality. However, following the instincts of the author cited above, it would have to display a number of features: unity, mutuality and exclusivity. The music accompanying erotic scenes should unite the lovers, suit their – perhaps differing – tastes; it must be distinguished by some exceptional quality. Although this is not an exact portrait of what we are looking for, let us try to discover this music on the strength of these few traces.

Perhaps it is Elvis Presley, who initially was shown on television only from the waist up, so as not to scandalise viewers with the obscene gyrations of his hips ('Elvis the Pelvis'). Or perhaps those eternal rock 'n' rollers The Rolling Stones and Mick Jagger, belting out *I can't get no satisfaction*. Why not the racy duet between Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin in the song *Je t'aime, moi non plus*?<sup>17</sup> Or perhaps some 'music to relax to', in which the producers would have us discover special musical 'aphrodisiacs'. For others, it could be 'world beat', where exotic locations and sounds might translate into such a form of fulfilment.

The anthropologist is always most interested in the meanings of things, events and phenomena 'attached' to them by people – in ideologies and historiographies; he studies more the symbolic pulp of culture than its official labels. At the same time, he makes no bones about pondering either those things considered lofty and noteworthy by cultural standards or phenomena classified as marginal or as the dead-ends of 'true culture'. His attitude is that of someone refraining from prejudice. So from this point of view let us look at popular music, which might potentially – and is it not accused of just this – constitute an erotic stimulus. This is because rock appeals to sensuousness and sexual desire and is associated unequivocally with immediate, deviational sexual pleasure. Yet the pleasures that it offers preclude the existence of true feelings. Rock is ecstasy, but then 'ecstasy is a moment wrenched out of time, a brief moment without memory – a moment surrounded by forgetting'.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the transience of the rock song and its particular manner of reception exclude any experience of more lasting value – if such can ever be sought. Values are memory, rock is forgetting. This 'aristocratic' perspective clearly suggests that rock-related eroticism is vile, base, bordering on the bestial, that none of the apologists of high culture (includ-

<sup>17</sup> There exists another, more explicit version of this erotic hymn, in which Gainsbourg is partnered by Brigitte Bardot; this recording is hard to get hold of.

<sup>18</sup> Milan Kundera, 'Paths in the Fog', in *Testaments Betrayed*, trans. Linda Asher (New York, 1995).

ing music) referred to above dared to defile his eroticism with the blunt cacophony of rock music.

In a completely different style, also expressing a different theoretical standpoint, the aversion of the above-mentioned individuals towards rock and its supposed links to biology rather than culture might be explained in the following way.

Going on the premiss that music derives from ritual, it might be argued<sup>19</sup> that the so-called 'popular mode' of its creation and reception lay in tradition and in human, biological memory. This mode focussed on the sense of hearing and could exist in only two forms – as sound and as aural memory. In the 'popular mode', musical practice is in every instance an attribute of the expression of the whole community and its collectively shared aesthetic. There is no such thing as a final, finished version of a musical work, just as there is no division between composer and performer. Only with the differentiation within a particular social group and the rise of specialisation and the division of labour do we witness distinctions between dance, theatre, poetry and music.

Out of the popular mode in Western music, there emerged a wholly new way of producing music, in contradiction to the multiplicity of popular forms, which it negated in respect to its key attributes. For although musical notation, which became the fundamental attribute of this innovation, was already familiar to the musical Middle Ages, only within the framework of modern industrial society was its generative, revolutionary potential fully exploited. The new medium of fixing notes, or 'notation', refers to written memory. It is an invariable memory, external to the user, as is alphabetical script;<sup>20</sup> a score is the final version of a work, a finished product, which can only be interpreted within the framework of that which is already given. Notation, of course, encourages a division of specialities between the composer and performers. But most crucially in the context of the present considerations, notation

is fundamentally a medium of the EYE, and not the EAR. As such, it is subject to the laws governing visual systems of representation. For example, melody and the division of time into even beats is horizontal; harmony is vertical. Musical notation is the medium of the fugue, of mathematical calculation, of the considerable harmonic development of polyphony and counterpoint, of melody played in inversion or retrograde motion, of the abstract and personal organis-

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<sup>19</sup> Presented here is a maximally simplified interpretation of the development of music based on three forms of memory – biological, written and electronic. The lack of space prevents us from developing many threads, which we leave for another occasion and which is hereby announced.

<sup>20</sup> On the role of writing in culture, see *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge, 1968).

ing of powerfully sounding orchestral voices; it is the medium of "the industrialisation of music".<sup>21</sup>

The third form of memory is recording. This remembers actual performances, and not their scheme or performative mechanisms. Recording brings the possibility of remembering and reproducing every sound that can be produced. From the moment when the first recording was made, 'the actual performance of compositions (on the one hand) and all producible sounds (on the other) became the *matière propre* of musical composition. This could not be achieved by notation.'<sup>22</sup> Thanks to recording, musical life once again revolves around the sense of hearing, as was the case with the popular mode; thus it refers to aural memory. And this, allied to the fact that sounds can be reproduced and played unceasingly, allowing them to penetrate every nook and cranny of modern-day life, would appear to explain the anxieties of Harold Bloom and Milan Kundera (and of Adorno before them) that popular music acts regressively on man. But is that really the case?

As cultural anthropologists, we are greatly impressed by the approach of Richard Schusterman, which he himself refers to as 'meliorism'.<sup>23</sup> Whilst pointing to many judicious observations regarding popular art made by elitist criticism, such as those in the spirit of the Frankfurt school tradition, Schusterman is of the opinion that there exist aesthetically valid forms of activity other than intellectual exertion which are nevertheless worthy of man. Rock music is an example – and what an example! – of a more somatic form of intensive effort and activeness, resistance and satisfaction, which distinguishes it in a crucial way from classical music, which is received impassionately and with distance.<sup>24</sup> Although the development of electronic media means that rock music is received increasingly often in passive immobility, its original, and most authentic, environment is the community of mechanical group solidarity, manifesting itself through movement, dance and singing to music.

An indispensable element of such a kinaesthetic reaction to music is eroticism and – as Bloom would have it – *alogon*, although, not as mind-

<sup>21</sup> Chris Cutler, *O muzyce popularnej. Pisma teoretyczno-krytyczne* [On Popular Music. Theoretical and Critical Writings], trans. Ireneusz Socha (Kraków, 1999), 35.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Meliorism holds that popular art should be perfected, and can be perfected, as it has real aesthetic virtues and can serve noble social aims, e.g. education.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Schusterman, *Estetyka pragmatyczna. Żywe piękno i refleksja nad sztuką* [Pragmatic Aesthetics. Living Beauty and the Reflection on Art.], trans. Adam Chmielewski, Ewa Ignaczak, Leszek Koczanowicz, Łukasz Nysler and Andrzej Orzechowski (Wrocław, 1998), 233.

lessness, but as a beyond-mindness resulting from the simultaneous action of the senses of hearing, sight, smell and corporeal intimacy. Touch, listen, experience. Yet the sensual action of rock does not mean that it is anti-intellectual. After all, sensuousness does not exclude the intellect, unless we assume that the body and mind are mutually – and absolutely – exclusive.

There is no denying that music was one of the motors of the greatest changes to take place during the twentieth century. In this context, it is singularly symptomatic that the social function of music turned out to be the transcendence of norms, particularly those relating to eroticism. Emblematic of these changes, of course, are the sixties.

This decade saw a whole series of musical paeans to free love and peace for all, which rang out at huge festivals of freedom. Enormous crowds of young people not only listened to music – often liberating their eroticism during concerts – but they also wished to imitate their crazy idols. The numerous partners of Janis Joplin or Mick Jagger, undressing on stage, Jimi Hendrix ‘using’ his guitar like a penis, excesses surrounding performances, real orgies taking place just after them: this background to rock music soon became the model of manners and mores for a new generation. Anyone not imitating this model at least accepted it or secretly dreamed of experiences of this sort. ‘If you remember the sixties, you weren’t really there’, as the well-known maxim says, and it would seem to apply not only to some drug-induced daze. Those individuals who truly followed the voice of their musical idols gave themselves up completely to bodily sensations and lost themselves in erotic experimentation, pushing back the boundaries of modesty, licence, normality and ethics; in a word, setting new cultural boundaries.

The music of those times cannot be denied also a clear emancipatory dimension: music transformed not only the social face of eroticism for the majority – the eroticism of heterosexuals – but also played an equally significant role in the homosexual movement. After the publication in the mid fifties of the famous Kinsey Report, we became aware that one-third of adult Americans had had some sort of erotic experience with a person of the same sex. The mainstream in this area remained decidedly male-female, but, as we can state unequivocally today, it was only a matter of time.

In the sixties, the unquestionable musical idol of New York homosexuals was Judy Garland (mother, as we know, of Liza Minelli). She won their acclaim with the famous hit ‘Somewhere over the Rainbow’, singing of how she longed for a hidden world somewhere on the far side of that multi-coloured ribbon. On 15 June 1969 Garland was electrifying her audience at a concert in Greenwich Village, yet just one week later



she died in London from a fatal overdose of sleeping pills. Following her funeral, the Stonewall Inn – a gay club in that same New York district of Greenwich Village – was sunk in a mood of depression and sadness, when all of a sudden a group of plain-clothed policemen burst in and arrested several people on trumped-up charges. As a rule, such incidents ended with a resigned silence, but this time it was different. Several days of riots began on Christopher Street, and the homosexual community cried out ‘Gay is good’ – they had emerged from the shadows, initiated their global ‘coming out’, and launched a determined battle for equal rights. One year later, the first gay parade marched down that same street. As a symbol of their movement they chose the rainbow, recognizable today probably the whole world over, a memento of the song and its singer, who provided the spur to fight for freedom and pride.

Of course, music as a weapon in the fight for recognition was not exclusively the domain of homosexuals. So let us just note, for the sake of balance, an interesting strand from the twentieth-century history of the lesbian movement. Towards the end of the sixties there appeared a specific female current in music which was intended as a reaction against the male-dominated rock ‘n’ roll subculture (sometimes disdainfully referred to as ‘cock rock’). According to the movement’s activists, this music was to be distinguished by its gentleness, depth and emotionality, thereby sharply contrasting with the mind-blowing hard rock. As for the verbal message, its central idea consisted of love for themselves, for other women, and for animals and all living creatures. The tribute for female music was Olivia Records, launched in 1973, which should be seen not as just another record label but also as a political organisation, in which, by contrast to male-dominated firms, the hierarchy of posts was to be abandoned in favour of collective management, based on the motto, ‘we are all women and lesbians’. The leading artist on Olivia Records was Holly Near, whose 1980s song *Singing for Our Lives*, with the chorus ‘We are a gentle angry people / Singing, singing for our lives’, became a sort of hymn for the movements fighting for equal rights for homosexuals. In this context, it is truly ironic that a concert organised by Olivia Records in 1989 featured more male than female performers, and that outstanding lesbian artists, such as Tracy Chapman, have recorded for labels representing mainstream entertainment.

This is one example of how different meanings and counter-meanings are often ‘attached’ to rock music, many of which appear to separate it from the intimate spaces of eroticism. At times we encounter more aesthetic pretension and political agitation than terms which could be related to erotic intimacy. One may, of course, attribute this to the times in which we live, where all previously distinctive categories have become

blurred (a politician must be sexy, and a homosexual liaison apparently carries political cachet), where music is appropriated by a hypervisual world of video clips and round-the-clock music channels. But this all brings us no nearer to solving our conundrum. So let's pose a straight question. Does music – in this case rock music – generate links with eroticism or not? Is it of any significance in this domain, or rather indifferent, like the weather behind airtight PVC windows?

Answers may be sought in two ways: by immersing oneself in one's own private world or else – not forgetting about the former – by carefully observing the musical theatre of our everyday lives. In the first case, the only truth is personal truth, being 'bitten' through one's own senses by musically transmitted erotica. The voice of the Sirens should be listened to alone, privately confronting its mythical magnetism. It is not enough to listen or to touch, one has to experience. Only then, when someone asks whether music *tout court* can be an erotic stimulus, would we doubtless reply in the affirmative.

This, however, would be an intimate reply, just as the eroticism which we are inclined to accept in ourselves is an intimate matter. Yet musical eroticism – that asemantic eroticism of music – has a contextual character; it always requires either a suitable cultural setting or else a moment of reflection, which always precedes distraction. In spite of the fact that it may be realised in a collective ecstasy, as we can see in hundreds of examples from cultural anthropology, eroticism is ultimately an individual somatic experience, only occasionally a longing for unrealised possibilities, although it is also sometimes crowned with fulfilment, which is accompanied by some source of music as the confirmation and strengthening of that towards which the erotic attitude is aimed. The paradoxicality of the erotic dimension of (instrumental and vocal) music would appear to lie in the fact that, whilst we may intentionally orient ourselves towards some specific musical work or type of music or performer, in the anticipation that he/she will evoke that desired state of emotional anticipation, in the moment when we give ourselves up to the erotic game of chance, primitive intentionality turns into total experiencing, which – as Baudrillard would doubtless have put it – has a fractal structure, i.e. one which is unordered and ineffable.

From the external perspective, it is impossible not to notice that the third form of musical memory, made possible by electronic 'notation' and the capacity to reproduce, also results in eroticism, as a general category, 'diversifying' into its various forms. These are sometimes connected to sexual orientation, as has already been discussed, may be strictly linked to one's belonging to some subculture preferring a particular type of erotic experience, or may correspond to a scale of sensitivities – from

those more intellectually orientated to 'pure' kinesics, as a distant echo of the ritual source of music.

One may have an erotic attitude – seriously! – to the covers of analogue records; it is they that are often the original sources of the fractally ramifying meanings of eroticism. A legendary status in this domain has been gained by *Sticky Fingers*, concocted by Andy Warhol for The Rolling Stones (the famous zip to be undone), or the same artist's banana for The Velvet Underground, which, when peeled, reveals a pink flesh. But there are other examples, as well. The little known American band Mom's Apple Pie has a cover featuring (admittedly, only painted) a vagina oozing a thick, sticky liquid; Kid Loco and Dennis Coffey 'signed' their albums with photographs of fingers inserted into a woman's crotch; Roxy Music illustrated *Country Life* with the image of two scantily-clad women lying on the grass; yet the most daring of all was the author of the photograph adorning a record by the group Blind Faith (line-up including Clapton and Winwood), on which we see the naked body of what is undoubtedly an under-age red-headed girl.

In this case it starts with sight, which moves into touch; however, both one and the other are founded on the earlier musical or, even more broadly speaking, cultural memory; touch sends us back to sound, and sound evokes recollections of movement and urges us to move. Here, the titular formula – Touch, listen, experience – would seem to be realised in an almost clinical fashion.

The eroticism of rock music, as we have endeavoured to show, is a highly complex matter. In the authors' view, analysis of this phenomenon should be informed primarily by the clear statement that any interpretation of the links between eroticism and music which prefers one of the senses over the others will unavoidably be incomplete, not to say false. From the anthropological point of view, this link is one piece of evidence as to how greatly complicated is the relationship between nature and culture. Bloom's antipathy towards rock may have its origins, among others, in the fact that this music reminds us of our undiscardable (but sometimes how pleasurable, how terribly uplifting, how incredibly capable of opening us up towards another person) biologicality. It reminds us, as it does not hide behind the screen of notation, of intellectual distance and focussed listening. It exposes that which should remain hidden; to put it another way, it transcends the convenient horizon of culture as convention.



Translated by John Comber